

Mayor Emanuel calls for gas tax increase to pay for transportation infrastructure



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CHICAGO (WLS) --

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and members of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus are calling on lawmakers to raise the gas tax as part of a capital bill to pay for much-needed transportation infrastructure repairs and improvements.

The proposal would raise the gas tax by 20 to 30 cents per gallon.

It may seem like a big ask, but Mayor Emanuel and others believe there is a bigger problem with the state's transportation infrastructure, particularly in the Chicago area, that cannot be ignored any longer.

"This has to be about achieving a permanent fix to our chronic transportation funding shortages," said Joe Szabo, Executive Director Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

"We're at a crisis point and the worst thing we could do now is to settle for a short term funding solution that will put us back in the same situation five or ten years from now."

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, or CMAP, represents 285 communities in seven counties.

In the mayors' proposed 20-to-30-cents per gallon increase, every five cents would provide an estimated \$250 million in revenue statewide, including \$20 million for Chicago. The money could be used to pay for road, bridge or rail improvements.

"If you take the lower range, the 20 cents, and since we haven't raised it since 1990, that would be just about equal to what inflation was since 1990, that's just catching up to where we were," Emanuel said.

Chicago drivers are already paying one of the highest motor fuel taxes in the country, 49 cents a gallon, plus another 10.5 percent sales tax on top of that. The thought of raising it even further seemed jarring to some.

"Yikes. That's pretty steep," said Linda Sandoval, driver.

"There's got to be a better way to find that money. They do need repair, but there's got to be other means to get that money besides from a gas tax," said driver John Heider. "It seems like we're being penalized to get to and from work."

The Illinois Petroleum Marketers Association said the proposed tax hike would be disastrous to retailers, especially those near state lines.

Wednesday Mayor Emanuel will roll out another plan to deal with the city's pension problems.

A source confirmed he will call for the legalization of marijuana, and a Chicago casino with all the revenue going to pay for the city's pensions.

He will also push for a constitutional amendment to eliminate the pension protection clause.

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